

STUDY ON BASIC LIVING CONDITION OF CHANGPA NOMADS

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ABSTRACT

The investigation was aimed at studying the changpa nomads of Changthang, 100% of respondents were staying in yak wool tents (rebos) which is made from traditionally yak wool. The tent was very warm but it becomes heavy when it gets wet due to heavy snowfall. They spend their whole life in that portable yak-hair tents (rebo). The findings of study revealed that the Koyul village was composed of 25 households. A total of 31(100%) women respondents were present in Koyul village. Korzok village composed of 40 households in which 58(100%) women respondents were present. In Sumdo village there were 19(100%) women respondents, that village composed of 15 households. Kharnak village composed of 15 households out of 15 household there were 29(100%) women respondents. Angkung village consists of 15 households but only 23 (100%) women respondents were present there. In Samad village and Hanle village there were 63(100%) and 56 (100%) women respondents respectively out of 40 households in both villages. Majority of the villagers used stream water for their drinking purpose.

KEYWORDS: Changpa, Nomads, Women, Households & Rebo

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INTRODUCTION

Changthang” meaning Chang means Northern and Thang means plains. It is a high altitude plateau of Leh district of Ladakh Region, bordering by Tibet (China) in the east, with vast highlands and giant lakes.



Figure 1: The Changthang is located in the eastern part of Ladakh in Jammu and Kashmir State, northern India

The nomads that move with their livestock across this plateau are known as the changpas, or “the people from the north. The Changpa have adjusted to the environment and successfully eked out an existence for thousands of years. The Changpas are a nomadic pastoral community who rare animals they move from place to

place across the Changthang, staying in yak wool tents (rebos). (Goodall, 2004) The people of the changpa nomads are divided into two sections. One is called Yulpa—that is to say, ‘dwellers in villages,’ and the other, the Changpa, meaning ‘dwellers in the desert’. The inhabitants of the desert have certain strange practices, which are to be met with among no other people. The people of Changthang, the Changpas are of Tibetan race are not different from other Ladakhis in their customs and religion. The language spoken by the nomads is Changskat. Changskat is a dialect of the Ladakhi language with similarities with the Tibetan language. The nomads are totally dependent upon their livestock for surviving; the livestock in turn is dependent upon the natural resources like grass and water for survival. The main occupation of the Changpa tribal community is animal husbandry. The nomads of the Changthang produce the finest pashmina wool in the world, which is the thin and fine inner wool from the changra goat. Pashmina is also known as cashmere, and the fine quality is due to the harsh climate on the high mountain plateau where the goats are reared. Pashmina wool locally called le-na.. (ICIMOD 1998).



Figure 2: Nomads of the Changthang. Traditional Yak Tent and Women Dressed in the Traditional

Geographical Area

The region is geographically situated in the eastern part of Ladakh, the eastern most part of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. It is the land of nomads located in the east of Leh on the Chinese border. It is a cold desert, one of India's five listed 'bio-diversity' regions, with a short summer and Arctic like winter, of sparse vegetation with a unique biotope, whose wetlands are recognized for indigenous and migrating birds and surrounding grasslands and marshes. Changthang sub-division with an area of 21,000 square kilometers, occupies a strategic position, sharing border with both China and Pakistan. The area lies approximately between 33° 10' to 33° 30'N and 77° 55' to 78° 20'E. The Changthang area is characterized by little rainfall and snowfall (only three inches of precipitation on an average per year). It is a cold desert with large dry steppes in open valleys. (Bhasin 2012)

Climate

The climate in the Changthang is very cold and harsh during winter the temperatures falling to -35°C. (Wenche Hagalia 2004) During the brief summer, temperatures are high in the day, but fall to around 0°C at night. (Pascale Dollfus 2013). Due to the high altitude and the rarefied air, there was a high degree of radiation in Ladakh and there is a local saying;

” Only in Ladakh can a person who has his head in the sun and his feet in the shadow endure both sunstroke and frostbite at the same time” (Ladakh book of records, 2000).

Changthang is characterized by extreme aridity, high solar radiation and strong winds. The saucer-shaped valleys are located at an average altitude of 4,500 m above sea level. Due to the low precipitation, plant growth is minimal (Rawat and Adhikari, (2005). The nomadic Changpas move over pastures in the Rhupshu-Kharnak Rangeland: subsisting and trading produce from large herds of sheep and goats, with yak and horses used for transport. The extremity of environmental conditions results in high insecurity for the nomadic lifestyle. Land is common property, and regulated according to community needs. Moves are directed by the elected headman (gompa), between allocated pastures. With 6-10 moves per year, each group has its own system of organization, building from the core structure of the household (rebo). (Goodall 2004; Namgail et al 2010) While reducing the grazing area the seasonal migration pattern had to change into shorter movements and the local nomads had to divide themselves into smaller units and shift settlement more often, which is more burdensome and exhausting, especially for the women. The nomads shift 8- 15 times depending upon the environment..Chaudhuri,(2000). According to Miller (1998) nomadic pastoralism on the Tibetan Plateau is characterized by a harsh environment where the grazing lands are divided by rugged mountain ranges, deep river valleys, and large lake basins that give rise to a great diversity in topography, climate, vegetation, and pastoral production practices. The number of livestock that die from natural causes is unpredictable and may vary from year to year. The households always have to account for loss due to risk and decisions regarding slaughtering for own subsistence and sale to the market must be carefully considered in relation to this. If a family owns a few animals and slaughter a large proportion in need of 55 cash or much meat for the winter, the decision to slaughter can be detrimental and lead to erosion of the existence base in case of calamities and diseases. (Naess (2003)

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Locale of the Study

The Changthang region in the Indian Trans- Himalayan area of Ladakh represents the western extension of the Tibetan Plateau, an important highland grazing system. It is a cold desert, one of India's five listed 'bio-diversity' regions, with a short summer and Arctic like winter, of sparse vegetation with a unique biotope, whose wetlands are recognized for indigenous and migrating birds and surrounding grasslands and marshes. (Bhasin2012) Nyoma block of Changthang region consists of 18 villages Nyoma, the main part of the highlands of Changthang region of Leh District. Nyoma is located at higher elevation than the rest of Leh district and is well known for its pastures and meadows, flora and fauna, its lakes, the nomadic lifestyle and the famous Pashmina goats and yaks as well as its nesting grounds for the Black Necked Crane.

Sample

The surveys were carried out between July–September 2015, both primary and secondary data were used. Primary data was collected through participant observation and through self structured interview schedule. The secondary data was collected from the published reports, magazines and from various official sources. Data was analyzed in accordance with the data collection; data was coded, tabulated and analyzed. The sample for the study was drawn from Nyoma block of Changthang region. Nyoma block consists of 18 villages from which 7 villages were selected for the study, namely, Hanley, Koyul, Korzok, Samad, Kharnak, Angkung and Sumdo. From Hanley, Karzok and Samad 40 households were selected and 15 households were selected from Karnak, Ankung and Sumdo. From Koyul 25 households were selected for the study totalling to 190 families (household) in the study area. From each household only women were selected.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1

Type of House	Village1		Village2		Village3		Village4		Village5		Village6		Village7	
	No	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Kaccha(mud house)														
Tents (rebo)	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100
Semi pacca														
pacca														
Total	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100

The data presented in table no.1 reveals that from all the seven villages, 100% of respondents (i.e. changpa nomads) were staying in yak wool tents (rebo) which was made from traditionally yak wool. The tent was very warm, and it becomes heavy when it gets wet under the heavy snowfall. They move several times a year with their tent (rebo) and spend their whole life in that portable yak-hair tents (rebo). All the Changpa nomads rear goats, sheep, yaks, horses and graze their herds on communally regulated allotted pastures land and they keep a dog to protected the herds.

Table 2

Staying Currently	Village1		Village2		Village3		Village4		Village5		Village6		Village7	
	No	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Koyul	31	100												
Korzok			58	100										
Sumdo					19	100								
Kharnak							29	100						
Angkung									23	100				
Samad											62	100		
Hanlay													56	100
Total	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100

The data presented in table 2 reveals that the first village Koyul composed of 25 households in which there were total 31(100%) women respondents. Second village Korzok in local language means “middle of the body” and also “middle of Mountains”. The Korzok village located in the north-west side of Tso-morirri in the Rukchen. According to the Changpas, Korzok derived its name from two words; Kor, which refers to the livestock owned by the gompa, and zok where goods were stored. Korzok village composed of 40 households in which 58(100%) women respondents were present. The above table also revealed that from Sumdo village there were 19(100%) women respondents. Sumdo village composed of 15 households. In Kharnak village there are 29(100%) women respondents were present from 15 household. Angkung village were situated in Puga valley which consists of 15 households and 23(100%) women respondents were present in angkung village. Samad (Rupshu) Samad commonly known as Rupshu. Samad Rokchen is located between the pastures of the neighboring nomadic communities of Kharnak and Korzok to the east of Leh Manali road There were 63 total women respondent were present and Samad village consist of 40 households and Hanle village which is near to the Tibetan border. Hanle Village is located at about 300km southeast of Leh, the district headquarters. Hanle village composed of 40 households from which total 56 women respondents were present.

Table 3

Where Do You Go for Toilet	Village1		Village2		Village3		Village4		Village5		Village6		Village7	
	No	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Open field	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100

Table 3: Contd.,														
Composting Latrine (Ladakhi Toilet)														
Flush														
Total	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100

Table 3 revealed that from all the village 100% of respondents had no facility of toilet, they go outside in the open field to ease themselves.

Table 4

Main Source of Drinking Water	Village1		Village2		Village3		Village4		Village5		Village6		Village7	
	No	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
River	5	16.12					6	20.68	4	17.39				
Spring	26	83.87	58	100	19	100	23	79.31	19	82.60	62	100	56	100
Stream														
Hand pump														
Total	31	100	58	100	19	100	29	100	23	100	62	100	56	100

Regarding main source of drinking water table no 4 revealed that from 1st village 16.12% of respondents, from 4th village 20.68% of respondents and from 5th village 17.39% of respondents use natural spring near the village which flows throughout the year down the mountainside. All the respondents from 2nd 3rd, 6th and 7th villagers used stream water. Majority of 83.87% from 1st village 79.31% from 4th village and 82.60% and from 5th village also used stream water for their drinking purpose which is fed by the snow and glacier melt and flow down the mountainside. The villagers have dug a nallah along the higher slope and diverted this stream water to the village.

CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that the all the changpa nomads were staying in yak wool tents (rebos) which is made from traditionally yak wool. The tent (rebo) which functions as bedroom, dining room and kitchen with a local heating cum bukhari (local stove) in the centre. The tent is very warm but becomes heavy when it gets wet under the heavy snowfall. Regarding main source of drinking water majority of respondents used stream water for their drinking purpose which is fed by the snow and glacier melt.

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